WE JEWS

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Anti-Semitism and the Christian Conscience

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Anti-Semitism is a sin which continues to occur within the Christian community and to trouble its conscience. Since World War II — and especially since the time of the Eichmann trial — a sustained re-examination of conscience on this point has been carried out by many Christians. One such re-examination was an article "Nosotros los Judios" ["We Jews"], written by a Spanish priest, Father Jose Jimenez Lozano, and published as a pamphlet in Spain. The following translation of the article by Father James J. Doyle, C.S.C., was originally printed in Perspectives *magazine, Fides Publishers, Notre Dame, Indiana.*

In the German city of Oberammergau, Bavaria, there is dramatized every 10 years the *Mystery of the Passion,* a theatrical production similar to the "Mysteries" that are dramatized even today in certain Spanish towns. The roles of the various characters are traditionally kept in the same families and in each presentation the same person portrays the same character — Jesus, Peter, Judas.

Psychologically, identification with the dramatic role influences the real life of the one playing it. It would be unthinkable for anyone playing the role of Christ to be foul-mouthed, an adulterer, or a thief. Judas, of course, is also a good Christian who must play the unhappy part of the traitor. However, a strange thing took place in Oberammergau some years ago, in Hitler's time. It happened that of the 10 chief actors in the *Mystery,* nine were enrolled in the Nazi Party and Judas alone did not share their anti-Semitic hatred.

This might have been an accident, but it was more likely the result of psychological influence. In the Passion play the Jews are represented as a faithless and hateful people who killed Christ and who for that reason have deserved the worst punishments. And in the play Judas is the one who finds himself on the side of the Jews, the only one who does not insult

the Jews. To the actors who played Jesus, Peter, and John it did not seem unchristian to persecute the Jews and support nazism; it was only Judas, the enemy of Christ and friend of the Jews, who at this time acted as a true Christian.

All Are Taught To Hate

What happened to the actors of Oberammergau has happened to almost all Christians in some degree. For we have all received from childhood a certain "instruction in contempt" of which Professor Jules Isaac speaks.

Even our textbooks have justified the Jewish persecution carried out by Christians throughout history. For example, a second-grade text that is used by children hereabout says concerning the expulsion of the Jews which was ordered by the "Catholic kings," "It did not have the importance that some have wanted to give to it, neither by reason of the number of those expelled, which seems not to have reached 200,000, nor by reason of its consequences, which were beneficial from the religious and political point of view."

How many human beings must be dispossessed for it to be of importance? It is imperative to erase from our books and periodicals any reference to the Jews that

can leave in the heart, especially in that of a Christian child, a prejudice or psychological predisposition against the Jewish people who are, after all, the spiritual ancestors of Christians.

We Are Spiritual "Semites"

The word "Semitic" comes from the name of Sem, the son of Noah, from whom Abraham, the Patriarch of the Jewish people, descended. What is scientifically inexact is to speak of the "Jewish race," just as it is inexact to speak of the "Negro language." The "Jewish race," according to the scientist Cyril Bibby, is a myth. There are persons whom one calls Jews, who are at times easily recognizable as such, but they do not for this reason constitute a race. An Englishman who travels through the United States finds that he is recognized as English, just as an American in Europe is usually identifiable, but this does not mean that there is an "English race" or an "American race."

The Jews are "a cultural group that combines a common religious tradition, an equally common sacred language and a large variety of common customs." There are Jewish features, a typically Jewish family life and certain occupations and

cultural interests typically Jewish, but there is no "Jewish race." One can speak properly of the "Jewish religion" or of the "Jewish people" but never of the "Jewish race." "Jewish" is, consequently, a word that is properly theological.

All of us who believe in God and His Son, Jesus Christ, form a part of this Jewish people, of these descendants of Sem (Semites) and of Abraham, the father of believers.

A People Chosen By God

The Bible tells us that God spoke to Abraham, who lived in Ur of the Chaldees, and told him to leave his land and his family for the land He was to give him. There Abraham was to become the father of a great people, the Jewish people, whom God had chosen for Himself. This was a pastoral people in the midst of more civilized nations; they possessed a fringe of land in the midst of great kingdoms. But with this people, on this small piece of land that was little larger than the present State of Israel, began the history of the world's salvation.

God changed the name of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, to Israel, which from that time on became the name of the whole Jewish people, and a son of Jacob became governor of a great power of that era, Egypt. The whole Jewish people settled in Egypt and became in time prosperous and comfortable. To show us the false security which money and political influence bring, leading to forgetfulness of God, the Bible tells us that the Jews in Egypt were "seated before the fleshpots" and that they became "stiff-necked" — disobedient and rebellious toward God.

At the same time they became suspect in Egypt and fell into frightful slavery. God renewed His covenant with Moses, as He had done before with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He freed the Jews from Egypt and gave them the Law.

The Law governed everything from worship and political institutions down to the smallest details of life. God indicated that by means of the observance of the Law the people would have Him in their hearts and that each time they disregarded it, they should recognize themselves as sinners and desire all the more the arrival of the Messias who was to come to free the world from sin.

But later an entire group of leaders and doctors of the people undertook to interpret the Law according to their own whims and to draw from it claims of greatness, after the manner of Napoleon. They fulfilled the letter of the Law while making a mockery of its spirit. And it happened that Israel, so led, frequently forgot God and adored the graven images of neighboring peoples.

God then became angry and punished His people, handing them over to their enemies. Despite His anger, however, He loved Israel as the apple of His eye and desired only that it return to Him. He sent prophets through whom He complained of the unfaithfulness and ingrat-

itude of His people. At times God appears in the prophecies as the spouse or bridegroom of His people and of all mankind. But many did not hear His tender words nor attend to His complaints. Then God Himself decided to come to Israel in the person of Christ.

Christ, A Jew, Is Our Saviour

Every day at Mass when the priest recites the Creed and comes to the words "*Et incarnatus est,*" he kneels to adore this mystery of God becoming man in the womb of a Jewish maiden, the Virgin Mary. In the Gospels we read Christ's genealogy, which begins with Abraham. We do not know what His physical appearance was like, but had He lived in our times He would not have gone unnoticed by the Nazi police.

Christ, the God we adore, He who is in our tabernacles, He whose body we consume in Communion is, then, a Jewish young man, the sight of whose countenance will be part of our eternal happiness.

But when Christ came to His people they did not recognize Him as the Redeemer sent to them.

Jesus knew those who were responsible in Israel for the inattention to Himself and for the failure of the people to recog-

nize Him. This was the reason He was so terribly hard with the leaders of the people — with the Pharisees, Scribes, priests and doctors of the Law, hypocrites and impostors.

Some weeks before His death, when from nearby Jerusalem He saw the silhouette of the Holy City, His Jewish heart began to expand as if to break. His divine heart overflowed with tenderness, and tears came to His eyes: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Thou who killest the prophets and stonest those who are sent to thee! How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but thou wouldst not!" (Luke 13:34). Perhaps His heart still hoped that Israel would turn to Him.

Who Are The Guilty Ones?

The story of the Lord's Passion is familiar to every Christian and we have all been moved by it. When Clovis, King of the Franks, heard it for the first time from the lips of Bishop Remigius, he is said to have exclaimed, "If only I had been there with my Franks!" By this he meant that he would have fought with his Franks against the Jews and Romans and Christ would not have been crucified. This is the kind of enthusiastic reaction of youth that we all have had at times when confronted with the terrible suffering of Christ.

Yet we should ask God to keep us from hypocrisy, since we are not exempt from blame in the death of Christ. On the contrary, all of us, individually and together, are responsible for His death. The Christian has little cause to reproach Judas, Annas, Caiphas, or Pilate because frequently in his own life he has played the roles of these persons, betraying, buffeting and crucifying his Lord by sin.

As the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* says: "In this guilt are involved all those who fall frequently into sin; for, as our sins consigned Christ the Lord to the death of the Cross, most certainly those

who wallow in sin and iniquity 'crucify to themselves again the Son of God, as far as in them lies, and make a mockery of Him' (Heb. 6:6). This guilt seems more enormous in us than in the Jews, since according to the testimony of the same Apostle, 'If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor. 2:8); while we, on the contrary, professing to know Him, yet denying Him by our actions, seem in some sort to lay violent hands on Him."

What a Christian can never do is to blame the entire Jewish people for the death of Christ, since it was not the entire Jewish people who rejected Him but rather a group of its leaders who were detested by the people. When the tension between these powerful individuals and Christ came to a certain point, they decided on His death and went through a travesty of a trial. The Dominican, Father Barthelemy, in a lecture given in 1959, suggested the following chief historical reasons why Christ died:

1. For being on the side of the poor and oppressed who were clamoring for liberation. This made Him detestable to those who wanted the social order maintained as it was at any cost.
2. Because Christ refused to identify religion and politics. Or, rather, because He refused to accept the idea

that the struggle of the Jews against the Romans was something sacred, that all the evils of Israel came from this political enslavement, and because He did not want to identify this enslavement with the enslavement of sin. What Christ preached was liberation, not from the Romans, but from sin.

3. Because Christ revealed openly the emptiness of those who had only the Law on their lips and who thought that this made them just, without concerning themselves with true justice.

Concerning the people who called out for His death, Jesus Himself said — and His words were repeated by Peter and Paul — that they acted through ignorance. The people, blinded by their leaders, called down the blood of Christ upon themselves and upon their children, but Christ said, "They know not what they do," and sought pardon for them from His Father. And how was the cry for pardon of God Himself not to prevail over the cry for blood of a people who were deceived and led astray?

Finally, there is one aspect of the story of the Passion, as the four Gospels give it to us, that many Christian sermons and books have unfortunately failed to see. In the Gospel stories of the Passion there is not a word, direct or indirect, against

the enemies of Jesus, against His killers. "Deicidal," "perfidious," "reprobate" and "cursed" are adjectives applied to the Jewish people by many Christians who do not understand the spirit of the Gospel stories. When the Gospel accounts end, there remains only the picture of Jesus with His pierced hands and open heart. It is a picture of the love that will seek men out until the end of time.

First Christians Were Jews

The first Christians were, naturally, Jews, and the small Church of Jerusalem was called the "Qehal," which was the name for the Israelites who surrounded Moses in the time of the exodus from Egypt. And these first Christians, at the same time as they followed the commands of Jesus, also followed the commands of the Law of Moses and still formed part of the large Jewish family. For this reason one writer called these first Christians "liberal or progressive Jews," and Cardinal Newman, referring to this infant Church, spoke of the "sect of Jesus."

Only because the Church was expanding and receiving pagans were most of the observances of the Law abandoned. It is still said of each child who is baptized that it is entering upon the "dignity of an Israelite," in the family of God, His Church, which remains Israel.

However, this family of Israel began to divide against itself because of hatred between Jews and Christians. The Zealots were a Jewish nationalistic sect whose members despised Christians as not being truly Jewish (how could a Jew like Paul write letters to the hated Romans?). Even

Paul himself, without being an extreme "Zealot," had persecuted the Christians as "apostates from the Law."

From that point on, in the second half of the first century, after the destruction of the Temple and the taking of Jerusalem by Titus, relations between Jews and Christians worsened to the point where Titus himself spoke of the "struggle of these two sects among themselves in spite of their common origin."

Some years afterward an extremist, Bar-Kochba, rebelled against the Romans, but the rebellion was stamped out and Bar-Kochba was executed. From that time on the Jews were not permitted to approach Jerusalem except once every four years when they could weep about its walls as they still do even today. This rebellion against Rome also turned into a war cry against the Christians and its effects are still present in modern times.

As Daniel-Rops says, it is on this Jewish desperation which became hatred for Christians that "too many Christians, forgetting the lesson of Christ, base themselves, turning this hatred back against the Jews." Upon this hatred of the Jews who persecuted them and who had killed their Saviour, many Christians have erected a whole series of false, anti-Christian ideas that have incredibly lasted until our own day and have unfortunately

given a pretext for committing a thousand crimes against the people of God.

The Myths Go On

Among these false ideas is, for example, the still widespread notion that the Jews were condemned by God to wander through the world until the end of time. Thus many Christians of good faith but limited religious knowledge wondered if the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 did not contradict the teaching of the Bible. And in past times there even were Christians who thought they were doing a service to God by killing Jews.

In the 16th century Ivan the Terrible had two rabbis who were resisting conversion tied to the tail of a Mongol pony which was then lashed to a gallop. Afterward the remains of the men were hung from a large branch of an oak tree together with the corpses of two dogs. Finally there was placed over that mass of flesh the famous Cossack inscription, "Two Jews; two dogs; all four of the same religion."

A well-known Jewish convert to Catholicism, Raïssa Maritain, who died in November, 1960, told how the conversion of her mother was delayed by the repugnance she felt toward the sight of the Cross

which, as a child in Russia, she had seen presiding over the assassinations and pogroms carried out on the Jews by Christians.

Yet there have always been Christian voices to condemn the false ideas about the Jews and the monstrosities committed against them. In the 11th century, when the Christians started to persecute the Jews after the First Crusade, St. Bernard of Clairvaux exclaimed, "Touch not the sons of Israel for they are the flesh and bone of the Messias."

In 1938, some months before the last war but in the midst of the extensive persecution of the Jews being carried out in Germany even then, Pope Pius XI spoke of the Jewish problem when he received a group of pilgrims who presented a missal to him. The Pope said, "The missal is one of the most beautiful of books. In it are found great insights even into contemporary happenings." Then he read the prayer from the Canon of the Mass which says, "Upon which deign to look with a propitious and serene countenance and to accept the gifts of Thy just servant Abel, and the sacrifice of our Patriarch Abraham and that which Thy high priest Melchisedech offered to Thee, a holy sacrifice, a spotless sacrifice."

And the Holy Father commented on this text: "Each time that We read this

We feel seized by an overpowering emotion. 'The sacrifice of our Patriarch Abraham.' Note that Abraham is called our Patriarch, our ancestor. Anti-Semitism is incompatible with the sublime thought and reality expressed in this text. Anti-Semitism is a movement in which we Christians cannot take part."

At this point the Pope could not restrain his emotion, and with tears in his eyes, he cited all the passages of St. Paul in which the Apostle explains clearly our spiritual descent from Abraham. "Through Christ and in Christ," continued the Pope, "we are spiritually descended from Abraham. No, it is not possible for Christians to participate in anti-Semitism."

Any Christian can note how many readings and prayers from the liturgy are taken from the Old Testament and how in the Easter Vigil service, after the fourth prophecy, the Church asks God "that the whole world may become children of Abraham and enter into the heritage of Israel." Today the Church is the true Israel of God, because, as the French philosopher Henri Bergson put it, Catholicism is "the ultimate crowning of Judaism." Or as another Jewish convert, Leon Paul, has said, "Catholics are the true Jews of today."

There were also, however, those words in the Catholic liturgy which remained

as relics of earlier times and which Pope John XXIII had deleted: from a prayer of Good Friday, the word "perfidious" in reference to the Jews, and in the Baptism of a Jewish convert the expressions, "Hold in horror the Jewish unbelief" and "Put aside the Jewish superstition."

Ten Points To Ponder

The Catholic and Protestant members of a convention who gathered in the Swiss city of Seelisberg in 1947 made the following 10 promises "in order to promote fraternal love toward the sorely tried people of the Old Covenant":

1. To remember that it is the same living God who speaks to all, in the Old Testament as well as in the New.

2. To remember that Jesus was born of a Jewish virgin of the race of David, of the people of Israel, and that His eternal love and pardon embrace His own people and the entire world.

3. To remember that the first disciples of Jesus, the Apostles, and the first martyrs were Jewish.

4. To remember that the basic precept of Christianity, love of God and neighbor, promulgated in the Old Testament and confirmed afterward by Jesus, obliges

Christians as well as Jews in all their human dealings without exception.

5. To avoid debasing biblical or post-biblical Judaism in order to elevate Christianity.

6. To avoid using the word "Jew" in the exclusive sense of "enemy of Jesus," or the expression "enemies of Jesus" to designate the Jewish people.

7. To avoid presenting the Passion in such a way that the odium of the condemnation of Jesus falls only on the Jews. They were not the only ones responsible, since the Cross which saves all of us proves that the death of Christ was caused by the sins of all mankind, not by those of one part of it.

8. To avoid referring to the maledictions of Scripture and to the shout of the excited crowd, "May His blood be upon us and upon our children," without recalling that this shout could not prevail against the infinitely more powerful prayer of Jesus, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

9. Not to give credence to the opinion that the Jewish people are reprobate, cursed, or destined to suffer.

10. To avoid speaking of the Jews as if they were not the first faithful of the Church.

Mary and The Jews

On January 31, 1842, the Jew Alfonse Ratisbonne received Baptism from the hands of Cardinal Patrizi, Vicar of Pope Gregory XVI, and some years later founded two religious orders, the Sisters and the Priests of Our Lady of Sion, whose purpose is to work and pray for the people of Israel. That Jewish maiden who is the Mother of God and of all men is therefore a source of attraction for Jews as well as for Christians. It is worthy of note that at Lourdes thousands of Jews have encountered Christ.

One of these, René Schwob, has written: "In the unforgettable audience that Pius XI deigned to grant me in February, 1938, knowing my Jewish origin, the Holy Father related to me his meetings with rabbis from Poland. On speaking to them of the Blessed Virgin, he said to them (and I use his exact words), 'She is one of you!' . . . And so, it is especially pleasing for me to honor this Jewish maiden who was destined to be the Mother of mankind."

Another Jew, the German Franz Werfel, although not a convert, said of the Blessed Virgin's *Magnificat* that it is "the hymn where one speaks of the God who dethrones the powerful and raises up the

weak; of the God who consoles His child, Israel, and remembers the mercy which He promised forever to Abraham and his posterity. . . ."

Anti-Semitism is a blot on civilization. It is, in the expression of Léon Bloy, the most horrible blow that our Lord received in His Passion, since it has lasted to this day. No one can call himself a Christian if he does not do all in his power to fight against every kind of anti-Semitism and if he does not love with his whole heart those people from whom was born the Lord who will be our Judge.

Charles Péguy has written of the Jewish people, "There is not a single place on their body that does not show a scar or the sign of a blow." May Christ not hold us accountable for the sorrows of His people.